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SUBJECT: NINEWA'S PROVINCIAL COUNCIL FULLY FUNCTIONAL

This is a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team
(PRT) message.

SUMMARY

¶1. (U) The Ninewa Provincial Council (PC) has evolved into a fully-functioning political body that debates and resolves provincial issues of the day. With this maturity, Ninewa PRT has assumed a role with Ninewa's PC that a U.S. Mission office would normally play in a developing democracy. Accomplishments such as passing the FY 2007 budget, fixing potholes, organizing a committee structure and cooperating with the other organs of provincial power are achieved without direct PRT intervention. Ninewa's PC has become a powerful legitimate engine of embedded democracy in this key province. END SUMMARY.

NO RECESS, NO PLAY

¶2. (U) The Ninewa PC holds full Council meetings weekly, and its committees meet daily. During the runup to passage of the 2007 Provincial GOI-funded Accelerated Reconstruction and Development Fund (ARDF) budget, the PC's Municipality and Reconstruction Committee (MRC) and Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) held combined hearings, during which they called in Provincial Directors-General (DGs) for extensive questioning.

¶3. (U) After two weeks of hearings, the two committees held three 14-hour days of debate and horse-trading to arrive at the draft 2007 ARDF budget. PRT members observed hearings, but did not participate in the committee negotiations. After spirited debate the draft budget was passed by the full council with a large majority on 4 April.

¶4. (U) Normally nearly all PC members are present for plenary Council sessions. For the ARDF budget vote, only one member failed to attend. Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) representatives, and the Provincial Governor and Vice-Governor usually participate. The weekly plenary sessions are recorded, start to finish, and televised throughout the province. Security -- every citizen's first concern -- leads off, with provincial ISF senior leadership giving a summary of the previous week's security situation. This presentation is followed by direct and informed questions from PC members. The security presentation accounts for less than an hour of a normally four to six-hour meeting.

POTHoles AND POLLUTION

¶15. (U) The balance of plenary PC meetings are occupied by government affairs of the same kind one might hear discussed at a U.S. statehouse or at a county board meeting. The PC follows an agenda prepared by the PC Chair's staff. A few weeks ago, a lengthy deliberation addressed the best approach to filling potholes in sidewalks. The PC hashed over the symbolism of simply repaving them as opposed to planting trees instead. Last week, the PC dealt with a report implicating a local cancer center in dumping radioactive medical waste into the Tigris. The PC formed an investigative subcommittee and will bring in the center's Director for a hearing on this matter.

¶16. (U) The PC's committees address the full range of current issues in the province, from security and reconstruction to education and religious affairs. As noted for the MRC and SPC, committees take the lead in their areas of responsibility. Working in conjunction with the executive and judicial branches of provincial government -- not always harmoniously, but usually effectively -- these committees seek practical solutions to constituents' problems.

¶17. (U) Our PRT contributes to effective constituent relations by facilitating participation of PC members at District and Sub-District Councils as well as general local meetings. Local grievances are readily apparent to PC members.

BAGHDAD 00001424 002 OF 002

COMMENT

¶18. (SBU) Council members face intense insurgent intimidation, and travel to Council meetings can pose significant risk. To alleviate this problem, the PC Chair facilitated sleeping quarters at Council Hall for members who cannot safely travel back to their homes if PC business runs late. PC members still struggle with the challenge of running a legislature for over two million people and a budget of hundreds of millions of dollars with fewer than two years' experience in this complex and demanding role.

¶19. (U) COMMENT CONTINUED. Despite these constraints, Ninewa's PC is a testament to the intense desire of the people of Ninewa to gain real control of their province through their provincial representatives. Strong efforts by our PRT and our Iraqi counterparts have yielded remarkable success - to the extent that televised PC sessions bear a strikingly satisfying similarity to C-SPAN. END COMMENT.
CROCKER